

Delta Town Hall

June 23, 2008 • Suisun City

The following is a summary of the questions asked and answers given at the Suisun City Town Hall meeting hosted by the Resources Agency on June 23, 2008

Q: What is meant by water supply reliability? Who's getting reliable water?

A: In the context of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP), it relates to the export water community. However, we have to respect water rights throughout the state, the conservation plan is not about allocation, it's about how we move that water supply.

Q: The SWP has a contract for 4 million acre feet. How much water do you plan on moving?

A: Water agencies want to maintain reliability of our existing supplies. SWP contractors have supply needs they want back before additional regulations were imposed on the water projects. The collective opinion is to evaluate the dual conveyance system and to focus on how we can move water safely for fish and people.

Q: American Canyon is entirely dependent on the North Bay Aqueduct for its water supply. Pumps are being shut down. What is being done to address the fact that there are large municipal supplies that are needed in communities such as ours? How do we assure that we will continue to have a water supply for our city?

A: State and federal pumps have an impact on the fish. Some decisions could create habitat that is in conflict with other water supplies. The BDCP must consider this. This plan is about moving the water supplies in a way that is more fish friendly; those impacts have to be addressed in the EIR/EIS that will evaluate a broader spectrum of impacts. The North Bay Aqueduct is of high interest for restoration. The issue of where and how water is diverted becomes a part of the discussion.

Q: You're going to protect North Bay supplies. What about the agricultural production that operates in the same area and has been doing so for the last 100 years?

A: We will be working with the interests in that area in coming up with approaches to deal with those issues.

Q: I'm curious about Delta Vision's recommendations that you have a co-equal goal for sustainable management and water supply. Who decides if these things are co-equal and how will they be divided up? How will you implement co-equal values?

A: The Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force recognized that you cannot get reliable water supply from the Delta until the ecosystem is "fixed", until revitalization of the ecosystem has occurred. Judge

Wanger has cut back on waters that are deliberately exported from the Delta as a consequence of Delta smelt and salmon. When the Task Force selected these as co-equal values they didn't say that these would be equally balanced at all times. They recognized that resources and any activities that take place have to take into consideration these co-equal values so they can advance together. Who's in charge of that? There are 120 different agencies with authority over something in the Delta. The draft recommends a governance structure. There is a recommendation that a council be created that is charged with implementing the co-equal values.

Q: Will this council have authority over what the counties and cities do?

A: The draft strategic plan is not intended to take away the authorities from any local government but it does recognize local government interests, regional interests and state interests. There is no intent to minimize any authorities from the five counties in the Delta or from state agencies that manage the Delta or the federal agencies. The draft recognizes the Delta Protection Commission will remain in contact with the local governments and calls for enhancement of the commission as the voice for the local governments and the stakeholders.

Q: I'm concerned with the issue of economic sustainability. The Delta is a finite resource. At what point do we say that we're drawing enough from the Delta and there are other resources that should be looked at to provide some of the water supply or to maintain economic sustainability based on the ag lands or other resources that the area supplies?

A: The BDCP is working with other agencies to decide what is sustainable and what we can do over the long term and at the same time restore fish.

Q: As we've shifted from an agriculturally based economy in the Delta, we've increased the cost of operating in the Delta. As we start converting acres from agriculture to something that is not producing something that can be sold, the economic sustainability of property taxes for instrumentalities that maintain the environment changes. The Delta Vision plan recommends 100,000 acres (about 1/5 of the agricultural land in the Delta) be converted into habitat as a way to restore fish populations. What does that mean economically for the people who live around the Delta?

A: We look at making decisions about land use relative to the idea that there is no marginal value in habitat. It changes the economic equation relative to local government in how these lands are maintained in relationship to lands that remain in some other form of land use. The idea of having an improved ecosystem is contingent upon having more of the habitat components that made up the original Delta. The idea of carbon credits and new markets and new ways of looking at economic opportunity relative to how we manage those lands may increase their long term sustainability. The Strategic Plan talks about having a National Heritage area that is a different designation than a national park. It is strictly for economic development and is locally driven and brings recognition to the area to bring in economic support. Ag tourism, eco tourism, ag friendly habitat, gateways to the Delta bring recognition to enhance recreation. From the context of the BDCP, we have a habitat working group that is identifying possibilities, talking to scientists and



figuring out various species' needs and how things might work. We need to come out and talk to local governments about what you have planned.

Q: The map on the BDCP handout shows four different state highways that go through the Delta. Who is charged with making sure that that transportation web is maintained and sustainable for the future increases in traffic that are expected to go through that area?

A: We will need to get Caltrans to answer specifically what they are thinking of doing. Delta Vision looked at transportation and from an ecosystem restoration, transportation is a constraint. It involves looking at creative solutions to deal with the sustainability of these transportation corridors. You may see a panel of transportation in the future.

Q: With Delta Vision, I know that your focus is predominantly on the state. When we hear about a worldwide food shortage, how do you justify or balance those competing demands with flooding agricultural areas that are some of the most fertile in the world? How do you say that that is something that looks at the broader spectrum of issues?

A: The question is the productivity of the land we look at. We are constrained in where we can look at the ability to restore habitat to allow us to make other lands more productive and be able to exploit those already in production but constrained by the availability of water. We're at a critical juncture relative to the future direction of things related to water that depend on the Delta. Our management plan update policies were adopted in 1995. One policy says no new wastewater treatment facilities in the primary zone of the Delta. At the time we understood the intent was to prevent urbanization. But with the transition to vineyards in the Delta want to look at ways for the mechanisms and tools to market that and have processing plants in the Delta so they don't have to travel. The Delta Protection Commission is trying to be consistent with Delta Vision. The Governor has laid out an ambitious agenda for assuring that the state can grow and more attention to the water supply. We're asking our local jurisdictions in our areas to look at water use efficiency.

Q: You stated that a reliable water supply depends on ecosystem health. There is conflicting information about what is causing the decline in the fish populations. Invasive species, salinity issues, ammonia, and pesticide use are some issues. How are these issues going to be included in the Delta Vision Project? How are you planning on getting beyond the stakeholders in conflict?

A: One of the Task Force recommendations is to focus not on species but restoring functions and processes of the ecosystem. The Task Force believes we can make improvements to the Delta, which moves us towards restoring production. We are one of the lowest carbon producing and food producing estuaries in terms of food for aquatic organisms. We have to focus on reducing contaminants and restoring water circulations.

Q: I'm involved in the mercury and fish issue. Some of the solutions here are directly in conflict and will likely increase the problem. How will you deal with that?

- A:** What we are experiencing today in terms of ecosystem deterioration requires us to take action. There is a strong recommendation for substantial science element in terms of monitoring learning by doing adaptive management. We have to balance the contributions of the other stressors (ag diversions, contaminants). Those are things that will be addressed as we move forward. One of the programs the commission has undertaken was when the regional board came out with the mandate to do the total maximum daily load for mercury for the Delta and having parameters established rather than have individuals from a landowner perspective, a county perspective, a wastewater treatment facility perspective, we opened it up to what we're calling the mercury TMDL collaborative. One of the big components is the recognition of balance and what happens in wetlands areas if you have defined TMDL. They are opening up workshops to continue those discussions.
- Q:** **As the city with the oldest water rights in the entire Delta, we rely on the water source. Are you looking at the barriers between Carquinez and the Suisun Bay area? Are you looking at that actually moving which is going to change Carl's fish and game opportunities to ensure that we have a proper Delta or are we going to be introducing new species?**
- A:** The species that have been introduced to the Delta prosper because the Delta is the way we manage it now. The submerged aquatic plant that is taking over stillwater areas in the Delta has created black bats habitat. Those are efficient predators for the native species and they change the water quality and water characteristics. This is an important indicator of how we maintain it relative to outflow patterns and how much water is enough for ecosystem purposes. We will look at Public Policy Institute of California, the historic setting for this and how the Delta functions in a more natural flow regime.
- Q:** **The comment was made during the BDCP presentation that there will be an adaptive management component. When you mess around with the hydraulics of a federal project flood control system in the Sacramento River that's been highly successful and decommissioning federal project levees, that isn't reversible. Are you planning to implement components that are reversible first and not build a canal and modify some of the irreversible components?**
- A:** The way we're thinking about BDCP and water supply conveyance changes is in two phases. That is a near-term where we look to optimize through Delta conveyance. BDCP is contemplating a long term fix which is a canal or the dual operation of a canal and through Delta conveyance. We're looking at the whole thing and how those operational systems work together. From a water supply perspective I can tell you from an agency that's 80% reliant on that supply there's a lot of reasons (seismic security and otherwise) that we believe a dual conveyance system has a lot of benefits and stability to water supply reliability that are worth investing in. From the habitat perspective, we're looking at floodplain habitat at the edges of the Delta which have a potential major role in addressing flood issues in these areas and improving these conditions. There is a lot of opportunity for synergistic work between flood control and flood management and habitat work. We want to make improvements and there are opportunities for lower San Joaquin River bypass which could provide flood conveyance and ecosystem habitat as well.

Q: If I want to know about flood protection in the place where I live, how do I find out about that?

A: Go to the main DWR webpage (water.ca.gov) and we have an alphabetical listing of topics. You'll find links to 200 flood pages including maps, planning activities, and flood control projects. From the main page you can go to FloodSafe, our new initiative with all the voter approved bond money and you can see the new things we're doing in the planning process.

Q: The strategic plan says 50% reduction per capita water use is a goal. What can I do to participate in this process? Will you tell people to start conserving water right way?

A: The Governor has set an objective of reducing urban water use by 20% per capita by 2020. This is the first time in the history of the state we've had a specific number and objective and we're planning to get there to reduce water use. We use 168 gallons per person per day in CA and about one-quarter of the water in the state is used by urban customers (about 10 million acre feet a year). If we reduced that water use by 2 million acre feet a year, that would be a significant improvement. As technology improves, the objective would be to not waste any water and 50% may be achievable. This will require changes in culture and how we live to reach those objectives.

Q: In terms of talking over people's heads and getting out beyond internet services, do you have translation services or other ways of getting out to people?

A: That is something we'll put on the board as something we need to think about as we move ahead.

Q: It seems there is a conflict at the state level because one agency is dictating to the cities how many housing units we have to build and in order to build those we have to supply water but we're talking about 50% reduction in water use and I don't know how those reconcile.

A: The intent is that we as a society learn to be more efficient in our water use. That can include using recycled water and doing things that stretch those supplies. I don't think reducing per capita use is intended to reduce population or lower the quality of our life. The intent is that we become better at using this resource that we have.